

## **Curriculum Offers Youth an Early Start to Healthy Living**

### ***Issue***

While walking through a local Walmart store, I noticed a number of overweight youth walking behind buggies that were filled with junk food, and very few, if any, vegetables and fruits. This scene could be anywhere, but it was in my town. What could be done to help educate parents and youth about healthy eating and exercise?

According to the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, the percentage of overweight children is a public health challenge:

- In South Carolina, 25 percent of low-income children between 2 and 5 years old are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight;
- Type 2 Diabetes, previously considered an adult disease, has increased dramatically in overweight children; and
- The Observation System for Recording Physical Activity study states that youth ages 3-5 are physically inactive during most of their preschool days.

Contacting The Horry County First Steps to School Readiness, which provides technical support to 37 daycare facilities, impacting 936 preschool age children, was a starting place. This captive audience is an excellent place to create positive attitudes about healthy eating and exercise.

### ***Intervention***

Through funding from the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's Chronic Disease Manager and Nutritionist joined forces with the Executive Director of Horry County First Steps to School Readiness to increase physical activity and healthy eating in county daycare facilities.

The N.C. Division of Public Health and the N.C. Cooperative Extension developed Color Me Healthy (CMH), a national award-winning curriculum. By utilizing this curriculum, staff encourage children to eat more vegetables and fruits, and play more. CMH provides teachers with tools that will enhance young children's attitudes toward physical activity and nutrition. The collaborative Horry County group:

- Adopted the CMH Curriculum to educate the teachers and children about healthier living and purchased additional activity bags for the centers, designed to increase physical activity;
- Applied and received a grant from General Mills, and attended training sessions at the General Mills site in Minnesota; and
- Identified local centers to pilot the curriculum, and planned dates for staff training at local centers.

### ***Impact***

Daycare center staff are being trained to utilize the curriculum to educate families on making healthier food choices, increasing physical activity, and implementing lifestyle behavioral changes that will help to reduce the incidence of obesity and other chronic diseases that are affecting our children.

- Ten pilot centers will be utilizing the curriculum and activity bags;
- More activity bags will be purchased with the grant funding; and
- Potentially, hundreds of children and parents will have access to various activities.

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